

JENNIFER DRAKE

Jennifer Drake is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology with a minor in Statistics from Boston College. Her research program focuses on the psychology of the arts. In one line of research, she examines the emotion regulation benefits of engaging in drawing for children and adults. In a second line of research, she studies the cognitive and perceptual processes underlying graphic representation skills in autistic, non-autistic, and gifted children in order to understand the development of superior perceptual abilities in relation to basic cognition. She also studies children's and adult's response to and understanding of works of art.

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Drawing to improve mood

In my work, I have examined whether the simple act of drawing improves a sad mood for children, and if so whether the greatest benefits are derived from using drawing to express one's negative thoughts and feelings or to distract oneself from negative thoughts and feelings. In this talk, I will present a series of studies demonstrating that drawing works to improve short-term mood for children not by allowing expression but by inviting distraction. This effect is specific to a drawing task in which an image is freely constructed, rather than copied. I argue that the positive distracting effect of drawing is a function of absorption. Improved understanding of the mechanisms by which drawing helps to regulate negative emotions will shed light on the basic mechanisms of emotion regulation in children and will highlight the important role of the arts in emotion regulation.